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ABSTRACT

A catalog committee operating within the University of California library system investigated ways to standardize subject and name entries for the National Union Catalog (NUC). Two sources identified as the contributors of most of the unreliable NUC card copies were research libraries with large special collections requiring expanded or refined subject headings and staff of special libraries whose primary function is not cataloging. The following solutions were proposed to the Cataloging and Classification Section (CSS) Executive Committee of RTSD at the ALA Midwinter Conference: (1) addition of brackets to non LC subject headings; (2) addition of a letter system (i.e., "X") to the reporting symbol of independent special libraries which do not avail themselves of the central cataloging agency available to them; and (3) inclusion of classification numbers to NUC card copy with brackets around those numbers which are not LC or Dewey authorized. The CSS committee felt the addition of brackets would increase the cost of producing the NUC and computerized libraries would need to reprogram in order to avoid brackets around tracings when they appeared at the top of a card. The report concludes with follow up recommendations made by the California Committee with a special plea for an authority list to be created and maintained when the NUC becomes available in machine readable form. (Author/JPF)

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NUC: LOCATION OR CATALOGING INFORMATION--A CONFLICT OF ROLE

by

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NUC: Location or cataloging information--a conflict of role.

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Abstract: *The increasing dependency of libraries on networking for cataloging purposes makes it necessary to standardize entries, both subject and name. Some suggestions for helping to standardize NUC entries are made, along with a plea to ground the projected machine-readable NUC in authority lists.*

* * * *

Since I assume from the nature of the program being presented today that not everybody here is familiar with the term "NUC copy" as used by catalogers, I shall define it in the words of William Welsh in the Foreword to the National Union Catalog: "It [i.e., the National Union Catalog] represents the works cataloged by the Library of Congress and by the libraries contributing to its cooperative cataloging program... In addition, it includes entries for monographic publications reported by about 1100 North American libraries and not represented by LC printed cards. It constitutes a reference and research tool for a large part of the world's production of significant books as acquired and cataloged by the Library of Congress and a number of other North American libraries."[1] NUC copy is, then, cataloging NOT performed by the Library of Congress but by over 1,000 libraries which then send a copy of their cataloging to the NUC office, and that cataloging is then interfiled with that of the Library of Congress, published in the National Union Catalog, and has been for several years now identified with an NUC card number, in the same manner as LC copy is identified with an LC card number.

One of the first commandments a beginning cataloger learns at his or her reviser's knee is that "Thou shalt not trust NUC copy as far as thou canst throw it, and that is exactly what I advise you to do--throw it!" Whence comes this rather violent point of view from catalogers, a group conspicuous for its docility and conservatism, conservatism which by very definition means, "the disposition to preserve what is established (note the established) and to promote gradual development rather than abrupt change"?

Two points need to be made about NUC copy to explain catalogers' negativism toward it and to bring the problems associated with it into sharper focus: 1) no cataloging department ever sets out to find NUC copy: it is the copy you find when you are searching for LC copy and can't find it; and 2) its use as a cataloging tool is a spinoff of its primary function as a "reference and research tool" (again, quoting Mr. Welsh). For interlibrary loan people, therefore, it is valuable as a finding device. Acquisitions people can similarly confirm pre-order existence of an item, and can possibly use NUC copy for on-order or in-process information. For cataloging people, finding NUC copy is dubious serendipity indeed, because its value is zilch for 70% of the records and needs at least classification for 30% of them (University of California figures).

The present rather intense absorption with the quality of NUC copy by catalogers at the University of California dates back about a year-and-a-half, when the UC Catalog Committee* was charged with developing a set of cataloging definitions for purposes of reporting. As part of that assignment, our Committee was obliged to give very careful attention to the source of card copy (in broad terms, LC or NUC) and most particularly to identifying the point at which cataloging based in part upon card copy could legitimately be counted as original cataloging.

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Copycataloging gave us no particular problem, because we agreed that only LC would be considered the source for copycataloging, and modification could range from relatively simple to relatively complex, but in any event never be so extensive as to warrant it being called original cataloging. NUC copy, because it represented about 10% of the cataloging done systemwide, was given serious consideration as we attempted to pinpoint the line between original and partial copy.

Before proceeding I would like to make it clear that we at the University of California would be delighted to accept NUC copy as a basis for cataloging. All of us use library assistants to process LC copy, and would be happy to do the same with NUC copy if it did not require extensive professional revision. Further, lest you think we find NUC copy unacceptable because we are great dotters of i's and crossers of t's, allow me to disabuse you of that notion.

Iconoclastic to man or woman, we decided early on that we would be as liberal as possible, obviously because of the enormous costs involved in generating new bibliographical records, but also because standards or no standards, there are some parts of a bibliographic record that are based upon subjective judgment. The use on NUC copy of such things as non-standard abbreviations is disregarded (we tell our people that "real world" abbreviations are perfectly acceptable, even in the library world); disregarded also is wayward punctuation, three (or whatever) spaces before the imprint, presence or absence of brackets, and non-conformity with International Standard Bibliographic Description. Subjectivity enters into choice (not form) of main entry, or parts of the collation statement, or the addition of notes; deviation in recording these elements is also not considered egregious error, and if the various components of the card copy can be verified by library assistants, it will be considered acceptable. Similarly, in many instances a non-LC form of name, particularly if it

is a personal name, can be standardized by library assistants, using various bibliographic tools, notably the National Union Catalog(!)

If the entry is a corporate name, however, and involves a governmental agency whose subheadings can occur in any combination (thus North Carolina. Division of Community Planning can and does co-exist with North Carolina. Dept. of Conservation and Development, Division of Community Planning)*; if an independent agency is added as a subheading to the name of another agency, thus usurping presidential powers by establishing yet a third agency with a stroke of the typewriter (thus, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the Center for Population Studies appearing in the same-size type on the title page could well result in U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare. Center for Population Studies); if the series statement is omitted (and sometimes a series statement and a sub-series statement, which is probably why it's omitted); if the work is not related to another via notes; if the subject headings are not LC-authorized (a recent example is Photography--Journalistic—if English punctuation means anything at all, what one has in hand is a journalistic of photography); if a name that is floating around on the title page appears nowhere on the record that purports to represent it (obviously, sins of omission are regarded as safer than sins of commission); the shakiness of the resulting record makes it necessary to route it to catalogers for corrections, for additions, and most often, for The Deep Six.

What then accounts for the unreliability of NUC records? Declining, on grounds of loyalty to our own number, to attribute poor records to sheer perversity, we concluded that there were two probable sources of most of the unreliable NUC copy for cataloging purposes:

1. Card copy contributed by research libraries with special collections so large that they require expanded or refined subject headings and classification. The underlying assumption is that the cataloging is done by

* Note the comma, which adds filing problems to the problem of conflicting entries.

experienced catalogers in the central cataloging agency for that library, so that the descriptive work, including main and added entries, meets national norms. Since classification does not appear on the card copy, the trouble with this category is subject headings.

2. Card copy contributed by special libraries, which also require special subject headings, or, if they are using a classed catalog, no headings at all. The underlying assumption here is that cataloging is done by staff whose primary function is not cataloging, and since they frequently retrieve what they themselves have put into a record, there is no compelling reason for them to adhere to a national standard. This category can thus cause problems with any part of the record.

Having thus identified the problem, at least to our satisfaction, we came up with two possible solutions; both relating to the above:

1. That all libraries contributing NUC copy be asked, via revised instructions from the Library of Congress, to bracket non-LC subject headings. The purpose of the bracketing would be to alert libraries using the card copy for cataloging purposes not to have support staff attempt to verify the unverifiable, but to send it directly to catalogers for subject analysis, and of course, classification.
2. That cataloging done by either independent special libraries, or special libraries which do not avail themselves of the central cataloging agency available to them, add a letter symbol (such as "X") to their reporting symbol (for example, a special library on the Harvard campus contributing card copy to NUC would be designated "MHX"). This would serve the purpose of alerting libraries using contributed copy to the possibility of non-standard descriptive work, in addition to non-standard subject headings. This would be the only "extra" required of participating libraries, to

avoid discouraging participation important for other than cataloging purposes.

Yet a third desideratum was added: the inclusion of classification numbers to NUC copy, again bracketed if not LC or Dewey-authorized. (Classification numbers are a useful feature in Manse'l, and make it possible for library assistants to verify and accept another library's work.)

The next step, we thought, was to open discussion on the question, and we therefore dispatched a joint letter to Gloria Hsia, Head of the NUC office, and to Jane Moore, Chairman of the Cataloging and Classification Section of RTSD. I was invited, as Chairman of our group, to meet with CCS Executive Committee at Midwinter, which I did. Well, what can I say? Huddled out there in California between the ocean and the Sierras, communicating only with each other, and sustained by our own vision of Bibliographic Nirvana, we had convinced ourselves not only of the validity of our analysis, but also of the reality of what we had modestly come to call "shaping up NUC."

We were soon to be disabused. Our proposal was given a most courteous reception and the most serious consideration at the Midwinter meeting of the Cataloging and Classification Section, chaired by Jane Moore, in which Kay Wexler, representing the NUC office in Mrs. Hsia's stead, and the chairmen of the Subject Analysis Committee and the Descriptive Cataloging Committee, participated. What the discussion boiled down to was that our "solutions" only grew additional heads on a notoriously hydra-headed problem: the addition of brackets to non-standard entries meant that not only were reporting libraries taking an extra step, but LC typists, editors, and proofreaders would need to do likewise, thus increasing the cost of producing NUC. In some instances, computerized libraries would need to re-program in order to avoid brackets around

tracings being included around those same tracings when they appeared at the top of a card. The problem of categories of headings omitted from Library of Congress Subject Headings was also raised since it would be difficult for catalogers to recognize when they were violating principles established by LC and when they were simply creating valid new headings by analogy with existing headings. The arguments are of course valid; presumably the latter (i.e., headings omitted from the LCSH) will be taken care of when a separate list of them is published.

The problems remain.

Two things are involved here:

1. What can be done about NUC as it now exists; and
2. What should be done about NUC in machine-readable form?

As far as existing NUC is concerned, would it be possible to photo contributed records, rather than retyping them? This would release time that could better be devoted to editing, and in the case of usable records, could include helpful classification.

Further, could LC send out a simple questionnaire in order to determine whether libraries contributing records are adhering to AACR, to the LC subject headings, and to LC or Dewey classifications. Libraries could be asked to specify what subject areas they are expanding for their own needs, and if there are more than say five, could so indicate. The arbitrary number chosen could serve to alert user libraries not to attempt any subject heading verification. In all instances, the information supplied could forewarn user libraries of areas of possible complications or discrepancies, and they could do as their internal needs and procedures dictated. A ten-page list of contributing libraries appears in the NUC Introduction; additional information would increase the pages by about 25, surely a small price to pay for such a useful contributor profile.

Whether or not this is worth considering depends on what the plans are for converting NUC to machine-readable form. When that massive undertaking is begun, however, it is IMPERATIVE than an authority list be created and maintained. Such an authority list would enable the NUC office to edit the form of all entries, both name and subject, and would be invaluable to libraries all over the country. Whatever forms did not correspond to those in the authority list could be identified in some way. There would undoubtedly be a fraction that would not yet have appeared in the authority list, but would be in accordance with AACR: the number would undoubtedly be too small to worry about.

Almost certainly there are some non-believers among you who are thinking that if NUC is a successful finding device, is not the concern with cataloging quality an artificial one, since presumably cataloging exists as a finding device?

There are several aspects to this: library employees searching the NUC are the bibliographically sophisticated, and we have no idea how many of them do not find NUC copy that is there. We have no figures, in other words, on the failure rate. We DO know that inadvertent duplication of titles takes place but we do not know how much is due to accepting NUC copy out of the sheer desperation induced by an enormous workload (some duplication is unquestionably related to backlogs).

If, as Michael Gorman suggests[2], it is decided to give official sanction to a multi-level cataloging standard, and most books fall within the middle (standard standard, if you will), it is true that most descriptive work will be at least adequate. It is probably <u>now</u> the case, because description becomes crucial only when one is comparing texts; if only one is extant, there is no

particular problem of identification. Again, it is the entries which are and will continue to be pivotal to a true national cataloging data base, accessed by a national library network.

Asking catalogers not to look at entries or description but to take a quick surreptitious look at subject headings and then slap a classification on a title is, as Joan Marshall put it in a related context, "participating in a sham catalog [which] is personally damaging and professionally degrading."[3] In common with their colleagues, catalogers want to use what they know; they do not want to put their initials on a bibliographic record that may be acceptably "quick and dirty" when a gaggle of computer people is responsible, but is just plain sloppy when an individual librarian is responsible; and lastly, they want to honor their collective commitment to the standardization of bibliographic records in order to facilitate the exchange of information worldwide. (That may sound high-flown, but I know of no librarian who is in it for the money.) In this bicentennial of our country, and centennial of our organization, a reliable (even relatively reliable) National Union Catalog, based upon authoritative entries, can go a long way toward helping all librarians get their act together.

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1. Library of Congress Catalogs: National Union Catalog. Washington, 1975.
2. RTSD Catalog Card Revision Committee program, July 18, 1976, ALA Annual Conference.
3. ISAD/RASD/RTSD Institute: "The Catalog--its nature and prospects," Oct. 9-10, 1975. Proceedings to be published by ISAD.